

COMMODORE

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"CHARACTER" PEEKS

Build a Custom Power Supply for Your C-64...

Reggie Ramloose — Assistant Editor

How many of you out there in Readerland have had your C-64 go on the fritz, only to discover that your power supply is faulty? And how many of you have gone slightly batty trying to figure out how to get the dad-blasted thing open? The failure rate of power packs is frightening, and is bound to get worse in these days of multiple peripherals. Consider: do you have two joysticks, a television, a 1702 monitor, a numeric keypad, a Datassette, four disk drives, a Cardco printer interface, a printer, a printer/plotter, a modem, and an expansion board with Fast Load, S'More, and Magic Desk plugged in? You do? And you're wondering what that burning smell is? Face it — the C-64 power pack wasn't built to handle all that. You need to build a custom power pack. One with plenty of punch that will also free you from the vagaries of Nashville Electric Service. And here's how to do it.

Buy a *Trader's Post* and look in the used car section. You should be able to find a junker that didn't pass MARTA inspection for under \$500. Try to find one that is wrecked, but still has a good engine. And show some class. An old Cadillac with a 400 cubic inch V-8 engine would be just fine. Have it towed to your home, and place it just outside the window of the room in which you have housed your computer. Next, find a 500-gallon gasoline tank and have it installed next to the Cadillac. Fill the tank with gasoline, and connect it to the carburetor. Next, remove the starter switch from the automobile and splice about twenty feet of wire to it. Run the wires through the wall of your home. (You may have to drill a small hole.) Secure the switch somewhere near your computer. You can now start the car from your desk. VROOM! Fun, huh?

Next, remove the output wires from the alternator and run them through the wall. Find an old refrigerator in the *Trader's Post*, bring it home, and remove the motor, shelves, and the fish in the freezer compartment. We will use the refrigeratory to hold the components which provide the voltage conversion necessary for the C-64. Feed the wires from the alternator through the back of the refrigerator. For now, just let them dangle.

(Coming next month: a trip to the Aerospace junkyard, and a WWI surplus house, as we conclude this two-part series.)

A Tip from V.C.U.G. . . .

On a few occasions, I've put my disk in the drive and it read that I had lost my directory. Feeling angry, I reformatted the disk. I later found out that there was just some dust or dirt under the drive head, and that I had needlessly killed all the programs on my disk. I advise anybody whose drive shows similar symptoms to boot the system over, and give it another try. If this doesn't work, clean your disk drive.

Confessions Of A New User...

Diane Clawson

I recently rescued a 64 that had been abused, and when the owners didn't want to bother with the manual and got tired of playing the cartridge games, it was unceremoniously stripped of its dignity by being literally thrown back into its box and neglected for over a year. I felt sorry for it, talked my way into borrowing it, and gleefully took it home. The 64 had no peripherals, so I purchased a Datassette. I've never used a 64 before, so I really didn't know where to begin. An owner-friend generously contributed pointers and recorded some programs for me so I could get the hang of how it worked. Connecting the computer was easy. Getting the programs to load and run is another story.

Trying to load a program was difficult at first, but after a while I got the hang of it. I loaded a program, and in a few minutes the screen showed OK READY. So I sat there, waiting for my program to appear on the screen. I kept waiting and waiting and waiting. The program didn't do anything, because I didn't realize you had to type RUN.

The first program I finally got to load and run after 15,000 syntax errors was "Eliza." If you are unfamiliar with the 64, as I was, this is not a good introductory program. Eliza struck me as a smart-mouthed broad. I innocently asked her questions and she replied with one sarcastic answer after another. After one too many smart remarks, I was ready to wring her neck.

I guess the most difficult part was trying to load another program, and it wouldn't load. I sat for hours trying to figure out what I did wrong, not realizing that Eliza was still in memory. So I thought to myself "OH! All I have to do is clear the memory." But I didn't have the foggiest idea how to do it. So I sat another two hours, savagely fishing through the operations manual (which should've been sold as a joke book) to find the answer but, of course I couldn't find it. I eventually wound up having a "stare down" with the 64 and having malicious thoughts (i.e., cutting its power cord in two, or locating my husband's chain saw and doing surgery on the keyboard!)

Two days and many frustrations later, the 64 and I compromised. We are slowly but surely becoming friends. I'll continue with the 64 and hope to learn how to become a great programmer some day. (IF IT LIVES THAT LONG.)

(Coming next month: "Greco-Roman with your C-64; or, are 30 minute tapes an endangered species?")

A Tip from Felix Rivera . . .

R.I.P. — Another one "bytes" the dust (ugh! — sorry). Ultra Magnetic Technologies, makers of those wonderful, high-quality/low cost 5¼ inch ULTRAS has apparently gone under. So those of you who have now gotten used to them must start experimenting with different brands until we can find a replacement. Who, if anyone, will guarantee the currently existing stock out there?